Supporting Kentucky's eLearning Ecosystem

Strategic Plan of the
Kentucky Virtual University
2006-2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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National Landscape of eLearning since 1997

Kentucky's eLearning ecosystem has grown dramatically since 1997. In that year the framers of the Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) foresaw significant growth and opportunity for distance learning to increase access, efficiency, and effectiveness in postsecondary education. Nine years later the realization of this vision is evident across the nation, the south and in Kentucky.

Nationally, enrollments in distance learning courses have risen. Based on the last national analysis, the number rose from 1.7 million in 1997-98 to 3.1 million in 2000-01. [1] In 2005, 62.5 percent of all postsecondary education institutions offered online courses to undergraduates, and 69 percent in the 16 states of the Southern Regional Education Board[2].

Kentucky's eLearning Ecosystem

In Kentucky all of the public postsecondary education institutions offer online undergraduate instruction. And Kentuckians are increasingly taking advantage of distance learning. Between fall 2002 and fall 2005 the number of students taking all their courses at a distance rose by 48 percent. In the 2004-05 academic year 55 percent of all students receiving a degree or credential had taken at least one distance learning course during the previous four years.

The Kentucky Virtual University (KYVU) is an innovation of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and an operational unit of the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE). Credit-bearing academic courses and programs supported by KYVU come from accredited postsecondary institutions. State agencies use KYVU services to provide supplementary education for Kentucky citizens from kindergarten to post-graduate education as well as professional development courses.

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[1] Learning Opportunities: Distance Education at Postsecondary Institutions. NCES, 2004.
[2] Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005. Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C), March 2006.

The state's official virtual campus opened its doors to students in the fall of 1999. Enrollment in the KYVU has grown from less than 300 students in that opening semester to 55,964 in the fall of 2005. Of these, 42,426 were served by Kentucky academic institutions. Enrollment in the not-for-credit courses offered within the KYVU infrastructure rose to 13,538. For the 2005-06 academic year, KYVU received and addressed 50,150 calls and emails through its Call Center and technical helpdesk services. On average students who use KYVU services are 34 years old, about 70 percent of them are female, and over 75 percent are from a rural county. Even more significant, 28 percent of all students receiving a degree or credential in 2004-05 had taken at least one distance learning course supported by KYVU.

KYVU partners with institutions and state agencies creating targeted entryways into the KYVU portal. KYVU also hosts five Web sites for instructional partners:

- www.KYVU.org
- www.KYVAE.org (in partnership with Kentucky Adult Education)
- www.KyEducators.org (in partnership with the Education Professional Standards Board)
- www.KYVU4k12.org (with the Kentucky Virtual High School and Kentucky GEAR UP)
- www.LETky.org (with the Kentucky Department of Criminal Justice Training)

An integral unit of the KYVU, the Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL) acts as the hub of a consortium which serves all public universities and colleges, public K-12 schools, public libraries, over 30 independent colleges and universities, and various private K-12 schools and libraries across the state. KYVL is also a reference and research Web site providing equitable access to quality library and information resources. KYVL provides access to over 40 licensed index, abstract, and full-text databases, over 76,000 indexed publications containing over 28,000 full-text resources, 557,016 images, and almost 2000 maps to all member libraries. Since KYVL's launch in November 1999, the licensed databases have supported 39.6 million searches.

KYVU Services

For its postsecondary and state agency partners, the KYVU acts as a clearinghouse for online course and program information and a provider of services that support online instruction. Both KYVU and KYVL work hard to be "high-touch" as well as "high-tech." KYVU provides many key services to the citizens of Kentucky, the students who request courses, and the faculty and staff who offer the many different educational experiences available on the KYVU. The primary services KYVU offers are:

- **KYVU Online Course Catalog:** As of spring 2006, students can search the KYVU database of over 1,400 courses and 100 online academic, professional development, and adult education programs.
- **KYVU Call Center:** Potential students, enrollees, faculty, and staff can dial toll-free during business hours to get help with registration or account enrollment issues -- or email anytime.
- **KYVU 24/7 Live Technical Support:** Students and instructors can access technical assistance any time when they dial toll-free or go to the 24/7 Tech Help Desk Web site to start a chat session or fill out the help request form.
- **Universal Coordinated Advising Network (U CAN):** Provides online feedback for academic counseling questions, including financial aid.
- **Kentucky Virtual Library (KYVL):** Via the Kentucky Virtual eLearning Portal, KYVU users are authenticated directly into the KYVL database search interface without going through another login.
- **KYVU Instructional Design Services:** KYVU offers instructional design services to KYVU provider institutions.
- **KYVU Revolving Loan Fund:** KYVU offers a Revolving Loan Fund to encourage institutions to develop more online programs to be offered via the KYVU. Institutions receive interest free loans that are repaid in three years to provide funds for more program development.
- **KYVU Course Management Software (CMS):** KYVU currently provides the ANGEL CMS, and subsidizes the statewide consortial agreement for the BlackBoard CMS, for development and delivery of Web-based instruction.
- **Elluminate:** KYVU provides access to Elluminate, an online, interactive meeting and real-time instructional support application.
- **KYVU's eLearning Resource Management Assistance (eRMA) software:** This system provides a single sign-on portal (using existing username/password) providing access to all KYVU learning platforms, including ANGEL, PLATO Web Learning Network, Worldwide Interactive Network (WIN) Career Solutions, KET LiteracyLink, Learning to Teach with Technology Studio, the KYVL's electronic databases, and online admissions and registration functions.
- **Training:** All KYVU and KYVL partners receive training on all the KYVU/VL "family" of servers, including ANGEL, eRMA, and KYVL electronic databases.
- **KYVU EduCart:** A statewide e-payment gateway that connects to Link2Gov, a contracted credit card processor allowing students to register, pay, and enter into professional development instruction online.
- **KYVU Excellence Awards:** Each year KYVU recognizes best practices in online course development and delivery though its peer-reviewed competition among faculty utilizing KYVU services.
- **KYVU4K12:** The KYVU4K12 initiative serves a wide variety of Kentucky institutions, parents, and children supporting Title I Improvement Schools in Kentucky. KYVU offers easy access to online curriculum targeted specifically for Kentucky's grade school students as well as student learning opportunities and teacher professional development for credit recovery, after-school services, or individual learning remediation services.

KYVU Evolves

When KYVU was established, online learning was in its infancy. During this incubation period KYVU provided statewide coordination and program development support, and became a service provider acquiring and providing applications and services to support integrated, statewide access to online learning. This included licensing and operation of course management software and the creation of the Kentucky Virtual Library. KYVU was an eLearning "utility."

A model of Kentucky's postsecondary education eLearning environment during this period would resemble a pyramidal structure with KYVU leading statewide efforts and broadening out into individual institutional efforts (figure 1).
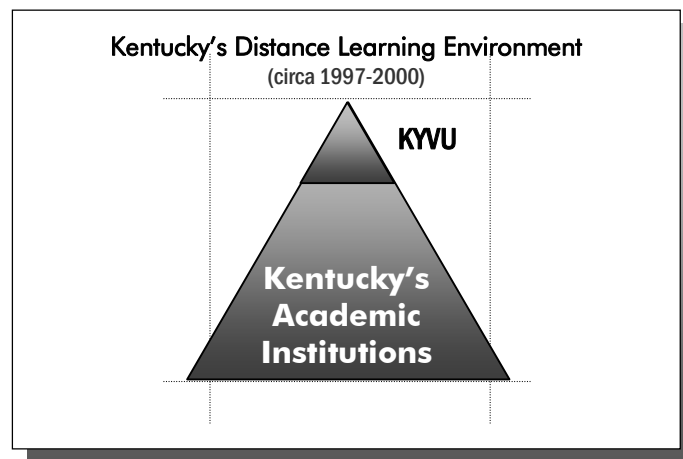

Kentucky's Distance Learning Environment
(circa 1997-2000)

KYVU

Kentucky's Academic Institutions

Figure 1

The new model of Kentucky's eLearning ecosystem reveals a significantly more symbiotic, collaborative, and interdependent model (figure 2).

Kentucky eLearning Ecosystem
(2006)

Agencies

KYVU

Institution
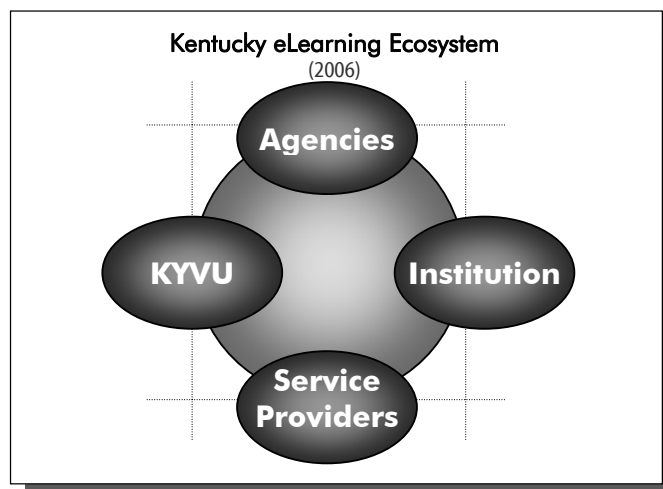
Service Providers

Figure 2

The needs for KYVU services are changing as the enterprise matures. The need for KYVU to be an eLearning utility is diminishing while the need for KYVU to support growth and innovation in Kentucky's eLearning environment is increasing. Development of this strategic plan confirmed that while some newer partners still need such basic services as Web sites, course management software, and registration capabilities, many others have become their own utilities, expertly managing applications like course management systems as core, mission-critical, production services.

Working with a broad spectrum of Kentucky's eLearning experts over the past 12 months, KYVU has revisited and updated its vision, mission, and goals to reflect the changing needs, expectations, and opportunities of its constituencies. The strategic planning effort has included input from multiple constituencies. These groups included faculty, students, and representatives of Kentucky's secondary, postsecondary, and state agency education communities. As a result KYVU's revised mission will be to serve less as a utility and more "as a statewide advocate for access to learning through technology, a convener of partners that use resources effectively, and a catalyst for innovation and excellence in eLearning."

KYVU's New Strategic Direction formed by CPE Public Agenda

The mission of KYVU is integral to the aspirations and initiatives of the Council on Postsecondary Education. Kentucky's Public Agenda for Postsecondary and Adult Education calls for a fundamental, profound shift in the way the postsecondary system approaches its work. The focus of the Council has been refined from an input focus that sought to add 80,000 students in postsecondary education to a more outcome-based goal of creating the plan and capacity to award an additional 800,000 bachelor's degrees by 2020.

At the heart of this agenda are five questions emphasizing the importance of maintaining affordable, high-quality postsecondary opportunities leading to more certificates and degrees, better jobs, and more productive, meaningful lives. The KYVU vision complements and supports the "One Mission: Better Lives for Kentucky's People" mission of the Council. The goals and objectives of the KYVU strategic plan have been developed to achieve results that support the Public Agenda and its five questions:

1. Are more Kentuckians ready for postsecondary education?
2. Is Kentucky postsecondary education affordable for its citizens?
3. Do more Kentuckians have certificates and degrees?
4. Are more college graduates prepared for life and work in Kentucky?
5. Are Kentucky's people, communities, and economy benefiting?

The 2006 KYVU vision and mission statements have been crafted to support the Public Agenda. They specifically address preparing more Kentuckians for college, making postsecondary education more affordable, and increasing access to degree and certificate programs.

KYVU VISION STATEMENT

KYVU aspires to create a technology-supported, lifelong learning environment that results in better lives for Kentucky's people.

KYVU MISSION STATEMENT

KYVU serves as a statewide advocate for access to learning through technology, a convener of partners that use resources effectively, and a catalyst for innovation and excellence in eLearning.

KYVU GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

An Advocate for Awareness and Expanding Access: KYVU will use its Web presence to attract Kentucky's people to technology-based lifelong learning opportunities through marketing and serve as an information clearinghouse to the educational community. A revised KYVU identity, comprehensive marketing plan, and marketing tools and services will increase enrollments and support retention in postsecondary education. KYVU will support efforts to increase educational opportunities by using technology to overcome the barriers of location, time, and physical challenges, giving all Kentuckians the chance to succeed. KYVU will have as its primary focus the goal to reduce digital divide issues as well as policy and practice barriers that prevent technology-based lifelong learning.

A Convener of Partners: To foster collaboration, KYVU will promote statewide collaborations among K-12 schools, colleges, universities, and workforce agencies that sustain lifelong learning. To do this, it will support communication and coordination of common events, initiatives, and opportunities across the P-16 educational and eLearning ecosystem. KYVU also will help eLearning partners to leverage their resources taking advantage of economies of scale through collaborative activities. KYVU will support focused initiatives that identify, structure, and guide multi-partner efforts to explore, acquire, and manage statewide instructional technologies.

A Catalytic Incubator: KYVU will collect, analyze, and use statewide and benchmark data to determine needs, make decisions, and assess the impact of eLearning. KYVU will establish and maintain an eLearning research agenda and reporting process that monitors, informs, and guides Kentucky's eLearning leaders. Finally, KYVU will foster innovative technologies that enhance the quality and accessibility of eLearning. It will build on existing partnerships to establish an innovative, catalytic incubator to support the investigation of instructional technologies and models that ensure effective, high-quality services and learning.

Changing Focus from "Utility" to Advocate, Convener, and Catalyst

The KYVU eLearning model (figure 3) integrates the six goals within the three roles of advocate, convener, and incubator. This structure provides the framework within which KYVU will set objectives and measure the results of its initiatives.
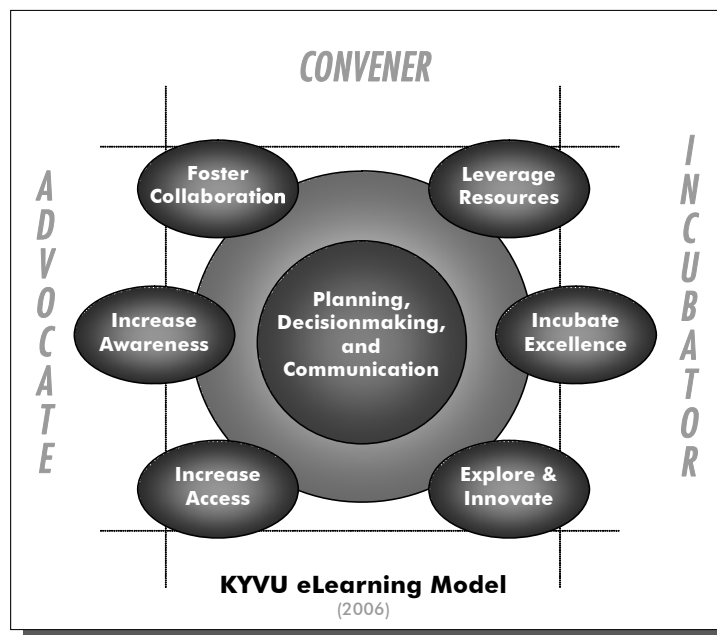

Figure 3

Based upon input during the strategic planning process and through on-going input as KYVU continues to assess the quality of and need for its services, it will begin placing more emphasis on exploring and incubating emerging technologies and developing statewide consortial agreements to acquire them than on owning and operating core, production services.